

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04
H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01
SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 TRSE-00 ACDA-07 OMB-01 IO-13
/099 W

-----141748Z 000929 /45

R 141129Z MAY 77
FM AMEMBASSY RABAT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1882
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY BAMAKO
AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT
AMEMBASSY PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L RABAT 2632

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR PINT MO MR SS
SUBJECT: MOROCCAN-MAURITANIAN RELATIONS FOLLOWING
ZOUERATE ATTACK

REF: RABAT 1754

1. THE POLISARIO ATTACK ON ZOUERATE HAS PROMPTED ANOTHER SERIES OF EXCHANGES OF HIGH-LEVEL VISITORS ABETWEEN RABAT AND NOUAKCHOTT. THE KING DISPATCHED ROYAL CABINET DIRECTOR AHMED BENSOU DA TO NOUAKCHOTT IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE ATTACK, ON MAY 2. SINCE THEN, THE GIRM MINISTER OF INTERNAL SOVEREIGNTY, AHMED OULD SALAH, VISITED RABAT WITH ALI CHERIF, SEC GEN OF PRESIDENCY, MAY 7. ON MAY 12, GIRM MINDEF MOUBAREK OULD BOUNA MOKHTAR WAS IN RABAT. ALL GIRM VISITORS WERE RECEIVED BY KING HASSAN. IN THE LATEST EXCHANGE, GOM FONMIN LARAKI FLEW TO NOUAKCHOTT MAY 13.

2. THE USUAL DECLARATION OF MUTUAL SOLIDARITY FOLLOWING THESE MEETINGS SHED LITTLE LIGHT ON THE SUBSTANCE OF DISCUSSIONS, ALTHOUGH WE HAVE HEARD THAT THE GIRM HAS BEEN PUSHING MOROCCO
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FOR MORE ASSISTANCE AND IN FACT HAD COMPLAINED OF LACK THEREOF IN THE WAKE OF MARCH ATTACKS (REFTEL).

3. ONE STEP WHICH THE GOM IS REPORTEDLY UNDERTAKING IS TO EXTEND RUNWAYS OF AIRFIELDS CLOSER TO MAURITANIA, A MOVE WHICH WILL GIVE MOROCCAN AIRCRAFT GREATER RANGE TO OPERATE IN NORTHERN MAURITANIA. THE RANGE LIMITATIONS ON GOM COMBAT AIR,

CURRENTLY OPERATING FROM EL-AYOUN AND SMARA, REPORTEDLY WERE POINTED UP PAINFULLY FOLLOWING THE RECENT ZOUERATE ATTACK. EFFORTS MAY WELL TAKE PLACE TO IMPROVE COORDINATION ON AIR CLEARANCES, THE GOM APPARENTLY NOW HAVING TO PUT UP WITH DELAYS WHICH LIMIT THE EFFECTIVENESS OF AIR FORCE RESPONSES IN EMERGENCIES.

4. LOCAL PUBLIC REACTION TO ZOUERATE HAS BEEN PREDICTABLY INDIGNANT. BOTH THE SEMI-OFFICIAL PRESS AND OPPOSITION ISTIQLAL L'OPINION REACHED RARE ACCORD ON THE THESIS THAT SOVIET-BACKED ALGERIA WAS ATTEMPTING TO "PUNISH" FRANCE AND MOROCCO FOR THE ZAIRE INTERVENTION, WITH A SECONDARY OBJECTIVE OF STRANGLING MAURITANIA'S FRAGILE ECONOMY. VIRTUALLY ALL PAPERS CALLED FOR WHATEVER STEPS WERE NECESSARY TO MEET THE THREAT, AND USFP LEADER ABDERRAHIM BOUABID PUBLICLY CALLED FOR REPRISAL RAIDS AGAINST THE POLISARIO'S TINDOUF SANCTUARIES. EVEN COMMUNIST AL BAYANE, ALWAYS HARDLINE ON ALGERIA, CRITICIZED INDIRECTLY SOVIET "SILENCE" ON THE ACTIONS OF ALGERIA'S LEADERS.

5. TO DATE, THERE HAVE BEEN BOTH PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL LIMITS BEYOND WHICH THE GOM APPEARS UNWILLING TO GO IN SUPPORTING THE GIRM ON THE GROUND. MOROCCAN FORCES ALREADY HAVE A CONSIDERABLE AMOUNT OF TERRITORY TO COVER IN THE SAHARA AND ALONG THE TENSE FRONTIER. PSYCHOLOGICALLY, MOROCCANS ARE SENSITIVE TO THE DANGER OF ACQUIRING A BIG BROTHER IMAGE VIS-A-VIS MAURITANIA. WE HAVE HEARD THAT THE KING IN LATE MARCH WAS UNHAPPY WITH HIS AMBASSADOR IN NOUAKCHOTT FOR HAVING "OVERCOMMITTED" THE GOM IN PROMISES OF MILITARY SUPPORT. NEVERTHELESS, THE KING'S NOVEMBER 1976 STATEMENT IN PARIS THAT HE WOULD NEVER PERMIT

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ANYONE TO SEPARATE MOROCCO'S FRONTIERS FROM MAURITANIA'S (76 RABAT 6629) STILL STANDS AND WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY SERVE AS THE LAST WORD IF A COLLAPSE OF MAURITANIA APPEARED IMMINENT.

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